Foure serious *Questions* of Grand Importance, Concerning *Excommunication*, and *Suspention* from the *Sacrament*; propounded to the *Reverend Assembly*, and all *Moderate Christians*, to prevent *Schismes*, and settle *Unity* among us, in these *divided Times*; by a *Lover* both of *Peace* and *Truth*.

THe businesse of *Excommunication*, and *Sequestration from the Sacrament*, now in *publike Agitation*, is a matter of great *moment*, much *difficulty*, and very *circumspectly to be handled, established*, to prevent *Prophanation* and *Scandall* on the one hand; and *Arbitrary, Tyranicall, Papall Domineering* over the *Consciences*, the *spirituall Priviledges* of *Christians*, on the other; which will necessarily follow, if it fall into *indiscreet, over-severe, ambitious, passionate* or *revengefull hands*, as we felt by wofull experience under the *Papacy* and *Prelacy*: (*Nam paucis res illa tutò committi potest: Mox solet subrepere Dominandi studium, & sub prætextu Pietatis luunt pœnas ob privata odia, aut Dogmata, vel Talia*; as (*) *Aretius* well observes; who debating this question; *An hodiè restitui possit Excommunicatio?* Resolves thus. *Sunt qui disciplinam hanc etiam hodiè reducere velint, in eamq; rem toti incumbant; Alii in eo videntur desperare: Et quanquam desperandum non putem, tamen perquam arduum judico, nec non impossibile præsentibus moribus, colla submittere ejusmodi disciplinæ*: For which among other reasons, he renders this. *Accedunt exempla eorum, qui idem conati, cum risu destitêre, aut quibus pessimè cessit: magno studio in Germaniæ quibusdam ecclesiijs instituta fuit; sed cecidit in spongiam natus ridiculus mus:* as some feare it may now do among us, unles it be setled with great wisdome, caution, moderation, certainty, and as little as possible herein left to any mans discretion; The serious consideration whereof hath induced me to propound these ensuing Questions to our *Venerable Assembly*, and all other moderate Christians, who ought in all things (especially in this) to avoyd *Extreames*, and the seeming affectation of any greater lording power over the Consciences or Priviledges of their Christian Brethren, then of right belongs unto them; least they approve that in, or usurpe that to themselves, which they have so vehemently heretofore declaimed against in, denied to, and quite taken away from the *Pope* and *Prelates*.

(*) *Theologiæ Problemat, Locus, 112. De excommunicatione, p. 340.*

1. Whether *Mathew 18.16.17. Let him be to THEE*, (not to the whole Church, and all others) *as a Heathen, and a Publican*, (meant only of personall privat trespasses betweene man and man, not publique scandalous sins against the Congregation, as is cleare by v: 15. *If thy Brother* shall *trespasse against THEE, &c.* not the Church: and *Lu. 17.3.4.*) Or

1. Cor. 5. 5. 11. 1. Tim. 1. 20. *To deliver such a one* to *Satan*, &c. *with such a one no not to eat*, &c. be properly meant of *Excommunication*, or *suspention* from the Sacrament only? And what warrant there is in Scripture for Ministers or others to suspend men from the Sacrament of the Lords Supper only, and not from the Congregation and all other publique Ordinances, together with it? since 1. *Cor.* 5 7. 9 13. *Iohn* 9. 22 32. 33 *chap.* 12, 42. *chap.* 16. 2. 2 *Thes.* 3, 14. 2 *Iohn* 16. 11. 3 *Iohn* 10. *Numb.* 12. 14. *Deut.* 23 1, 2, 3. with all other Scriptures alleaged for the proofe or practise of Excommunication; speake only of *putting, casting out, and excluding men wholly from the Congregation, Synagogue, and all publique Christian Communion*; but not one of them of excluding, or suspending men only from the Sacrament, and not from other publique Ordinances, as Prayer, Preaching, and the like: And since in the *primitive times*, (as is evident by *Tertulians* Apollogy: *c. 39. De Panitentia Lib.* and others) scandalous persons, were ever excommunicated and wholy cast out of the Church (*extra Gregem dati*) not barely sequestred from the Sacrament: Whence all the Canonists and Schoole-men determine: (*b*) *Excommunicatus non possit interesse divinis Officiis in Ecclesia, vel extra cum aliis:* and define Excommunication to be, *An Ecclesiaticall censure, which deprives a man from the Communion of the Church, Sacraments, and all publike Ordinances*: and Aretius defines it, to be, *A cuius professi Religionem nostram, à consortio fidelium, in sacris et prophanis rebus exclusio, &c.* which excludes men totally from the Church, and all publique Ordinances, not from the Sacrament only.

(b) *Petrus Binsfildius. Enchiridion Theologiæ Pastoralis De Censuris Eccles: p. 616. Summa Angelica, et Rosella, Antoninus, Alphonsus à Castro, Covarruuius, Navar: and others in verbo, Excommunicatio.*

2. By what Divine Authority or Scripture Text, can any Minister lawfully keepe backe any Christian from the Sacrament, (not actually Excommunicated and cast out of the Church for some notorious scandall upon a legall Conviction) who earnestly desires to receive it, though in his owne private judgment hee deemes him unfitting or unworthy? since we read of no circumcised person in the old Testament, ever debarred from the Passeover by the Priests, that was willing or desirous to eat it, though perchance not altogether so prepared to eate it, as God required, *Exod.* 12. 3. 4. &c. 44, to 58. 2 *Chron.* 30. 13. to 21. Since Christ himselfe admitted *Iudas* to it, though he knew him to bee a *Devill*, a *Traitor*; *Iohn* 6. 70. 71. as is cleere by *Math.* 26 20. to 31 *Mar:* 14. 18. &c. *Luke* 22. 14 &c. *Iohn* 13. 31. And since *Paul in the* 1. *cor.* 11. 20. 1036: usurped no other Authority to himselfe, nor gave any power to others, to keepe unworthy receivers from the Sacrament, but only admonished them *of the danger of unworthy receiving*, and thereupon advised every Receiver, *to examine HIM SELFE* before hee came to receive? And whether the Minister by admonishing his Flock, of the danger of unworthy

worthy receiving, and ſeriouſly dehorting ſuch as hee deemes unworthy not to receive the Sacrament til they become more fit to participate, under paine of eating and drinking their owne damnation, and other judgments that will enſue thereon, hath not thereby diſcharged his full duty and conſcience, as this text of the *Corinths*: *Ezech.* 33.1. to 10. *Acts* 20.26.27. with the Liturgyes of our own and the French Churches, in their Exhortations before the Sacrament, both intimate and reſolve?

3. Whether the unprofitable, and unworthy hearing of the word, be not as great, as dangerous, as damning a ſinne, as the unworthy receiving of the Sacrament, as *Math.* 10.14.15. *Mar.16*,15, 16, *Luk* 8.18 *Heb.*2 1,2,3.c.3.7,8,12.6.6.6.7.8: aſſert? Whether Miniſters upon the ſelfe ſame grounds and pretences (of partaking of other mens ſins, of being guilty of their damnations, of not giving holy things to Dogges and caſting Pearles before Swine; *Math.* 7. 6. meant principally of preaching the Goſpell to ſuch as ſhall contemne it, not of the Sacrament, as is cleare by *Math*:10,14, *Mar.* 16, 15.16. *Acts* 13 46,51) may not as well keepe their people from preaching of the word, and refuſe to preach unto them, leaſt it ſhould not profit them for want of faith, *Hebr.*4 2. but increaſe, or aggravate their ſins, and *become unto them the Savour of death unto death*, 2 *Cor* 2.15: 16 *Iohn* 12:48. as from the Sacrament? And what ſubſtantial difference they can produce, warranted by Scripture, why they may not deny to preach the word to ſuch Chriſtians whom they deeme unprofitable under, or unfit to heare it, as the Sacrament to thoſe whom they judge unmeet to receive it?

4. Whether, ſeeing God only knowes the *Secrets of all mens hearts, and who are his*, 2 *Chron.*6.30. 2 *Tim.* 2. 19. not Miniſters; who may oft times deeme thoſe Worthy Communicants, who are not (as cloſe Hypocrites, *&c.*) and thoſe unworthy who are not, *1 Samuel 16.* 5. to 14. Seeing hee can *ſodainly change notorious ſinners hearts, lives, and bring them to repentance in a moment, before Miniſters can take reall notice of it, Act.* 9.3. to 28. Seeing wee muſt *not cenſoriouſly judge one another, becauſe wee ſtand or fall to our owne Maſter, Matth.* 7. 1. *Luk.* 6.37. *Rom.* 14.4. to 15. Seeing none muſt quench the ſmoking flax, nor breake the bruiſed Reed, nor diſcourage weake Chriſtians by overmuch rigor, or indiſcretion, *Matth.*12 20. *Rom.* 14. Seeing every Communicant is bound to *examine HIMSELFE*, which he beſt knowes, (not others peremptorily to examine him) 1 *Cor.*11.27. 28,29. 2 *Cor.* 13 5. *Gal.*6.4. 5. And every man is *only to beare his owne ſinne*, not anothers, in *which he is no partaker*, *Gal* 6. 4. 5. *Ezec.* 33.1. to 10. *Ezec.* 18.4. to 21. And ſeeing every Chriſtian when he is invited to the Sacrament, is bound under paine of ſin and contempt to receive it, 1 *Cor.*11. *Heb.*10.29. Whether can any Miniſter in point of Conſcience refuſe any Chriſtian, not actually excommunicated, the

Sacrament, if he desires to receive it, in case hee professe his sincere repentance for his sins past, and promise newnesse of life for time to come, though in his own private opinion, he may chance to judge him a person unfit or unworthy to communicate? If yea, let him shew his charter for it in Scripture: This I am certain hee cannot doe: If he alleage, hee cannot do it in point of Conscience, because hee should bee paraker of his sin, *if he eate and drink damnation* by unworthy receiving: The Apostle resolves the contrary; that *hee eates and drinkes damnation only to HIMSELFE*, not to the Minister, or the other *Communicants*; that he shall only beare his own burthen, and give an account of himselfe to God, *Gal. 6. 4,5. Rom. 14. 12.* And the administration being onely the Ministers act, which is a holy and divine institution, the unworthy participation the parties owne iniquity, (as is his unworthy hearing, praying *&c.*) not the Ministers; it can no more involve the Minister in the guilt of it, then his unprofitable hearing; of which no Minister holds himselfe guilty, who with care and conscience faithfully dispenceth the Word unto his Auditors, *Eze. 33. 1. to 10. Acts 20. 26. 27*; which * *Lucas Osiander* proves at large against the *Anabaptists.*

(*) *Euchiridian Contro. ver. Cum Anabap. De Eccleſia. c. 6. Quæſt. 3.*

Seeing therfore there is as much danger to peoples Soules in their unworthy, unprofitable hearing of the word, as receiving of the Sacraments; and since Ministers are and may be unto *God a Sweet savour of Christ*, as well in them *that perish*, by unworthy receiving the Sacrament as in them that are saved, by worthy participation thereof; as they are in the preaching of the Gospell, 2 *Cor. 2. 14, 15, 16.* I cannot discerne any shadow of reason, why any godly Ministers should over-earnestly contest for such a large or unlimited Ecclesiasticall power, to exclude their Christian Brethren from the Sacrament (when not actually excommunicated from the Church and other Ordinances) as some pretend to; much lesse, why any of them should resolve to give over their Ministery to which Christ hath called them, in case they cannot obtaine such a power from the Parliament, as neither Christ, nor his Apostles, nor the Primitive Christians in the purest times did ever exercise; or why any shold frowardly seperate from our Church, in case such an unlimited arbitrary power be not established in our new Presbiteries, as our very Lordly Prelats never durst to claime. *Moderata durant.* Wherefore my earnest request to all Ministers and people shall be, to rest fully satisfied with such a limited Iurisdiction in this kind, as our Honourable, Parliament upon serious debate, shall in their Piety and Wisdom thinke meete to settle, for the prevention of scandall, Prophanesse in the people, of Tyranny and oppression of mens consciences in the Presbytery; the only desirable boundary betweene these two Extremities, which must be avoyded with all speciall care.

FINIS.